

RARE BROOCHES FROM VIEŠVILĖ CEMETERY III, LITHUANIA

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Abstract

Four rare brooches were found during archaeological investigations in Viešvilė cemetery III (in the Jurbarkas district). Three of them are close to the 'equal-armed' brooches, of which the shape recalls a ribbon. The fourth brooch was found in child's grave 35. It belongs to the group of flat openwork brooches. The brooch was decorated with two stylised animal heads and a weaving pattern. Analogies were not found in Lithuanian archaeological material. In this article, the author discusses the possible origin and chronology of the brooches found in Viešvilė cemetery III.

Key words: Scalvians, River Nemunas, lower reaches, equal-armed brooches, flat openwork brooch.

Viešvilė cemetery III was discovered in 2004 on the right bank of the River Nemunas (Fig. 1). It is in the southern part of the town of Viešvilė (in the Jurbarkas district), at a distance of about 200 metres north of another cemetery with the same name (Viešvilė cemetery I). An unfortified settlement was found next to it. It covers an area of approximately three hectares. The settlement was found on the right bank of the River Viešvilė, at a distance of about 300 metres from the cemetery. Chronologically, this archaeological complex is close to and belonged to the Scalvian community, which settled in the area around the River Nemunas in the Late Iron Age. The convenient geographical location, with the River Nemunas flowing nearby and the River Viešvilė flowing into it, meant that people had settled here since at least the Middle Iron Age. The Nemunas has always been one of the main trade routes connecting the tribes living on the Baltic coast with the Scalvians, who inhabited the lower reaches of the River Nemunas, and the upland Lithuanians (in Lithuanian *aukštaičiai*) and Lithuanians in the middle and east of Lithuania (Žulkus 2004, pp.125-131). This is proven by the numerous find sites of Scandinavian and West European imports in the lower reaches of the Nemunas. The aim of this article is to describe some rare brooches that were found in 2008 and 2009 during archaeological investigations in Viešvilė cemetery III, as well as to discuss analogies and the dating of these brooches.

In four years, with funding from Trakai History Museum, a 330-square-metre area was investigated in

Viešvilė cemetery III (Budvydas 2007, p.144ff; 2010, p.111ff; Ševeliovas, Budvydas 2009, p.130ff). During the archaeological investigations, 53 inhumation and cremation graves were found. The cemetery has been ploughed and wind-blown for a long time, and therefore it is badly damaged. Although during the investigations only a few cremation graves were found, numerous random molten brass artefacts from damaged cremation graves were found on the surface of the ground. The investigation material of Viešvilė cemetery III will be published in the future, after the archaeological excavations, but even now it is evident that children and teenagers were buried in all the inhumation burials. The dead were buried with few grave goods, mainly clay moulded cups. In some graves, the deceased were buried with children's brass bracelets, neck-rings and brooches. The material found during the investigations is not unique, it is close to the West Lithuanian cemeteries of the Late Iron Age. However, in burials 30, 35 and 45, three rare brooches were found.

In child's burial 35, a flat oval openwork brooch 1.8 by 3.6 centimetres was found (Fig. 2.1). It was found on the chest of the deceased individual. This brooch consists of a flat oval ring, in the middle of which there is a rhombus with a round hole in the middle. The ends of the rhombus are decorated with small round spots. On both ends of the brooch there are different-sized protrusions, which are decorated with animal heads. The ring and rhombus of the brooch are decorated with recessed double grooves beside the animal heads,

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Fig. 1. Ninth to 12th-century Scalvian cemeteries.

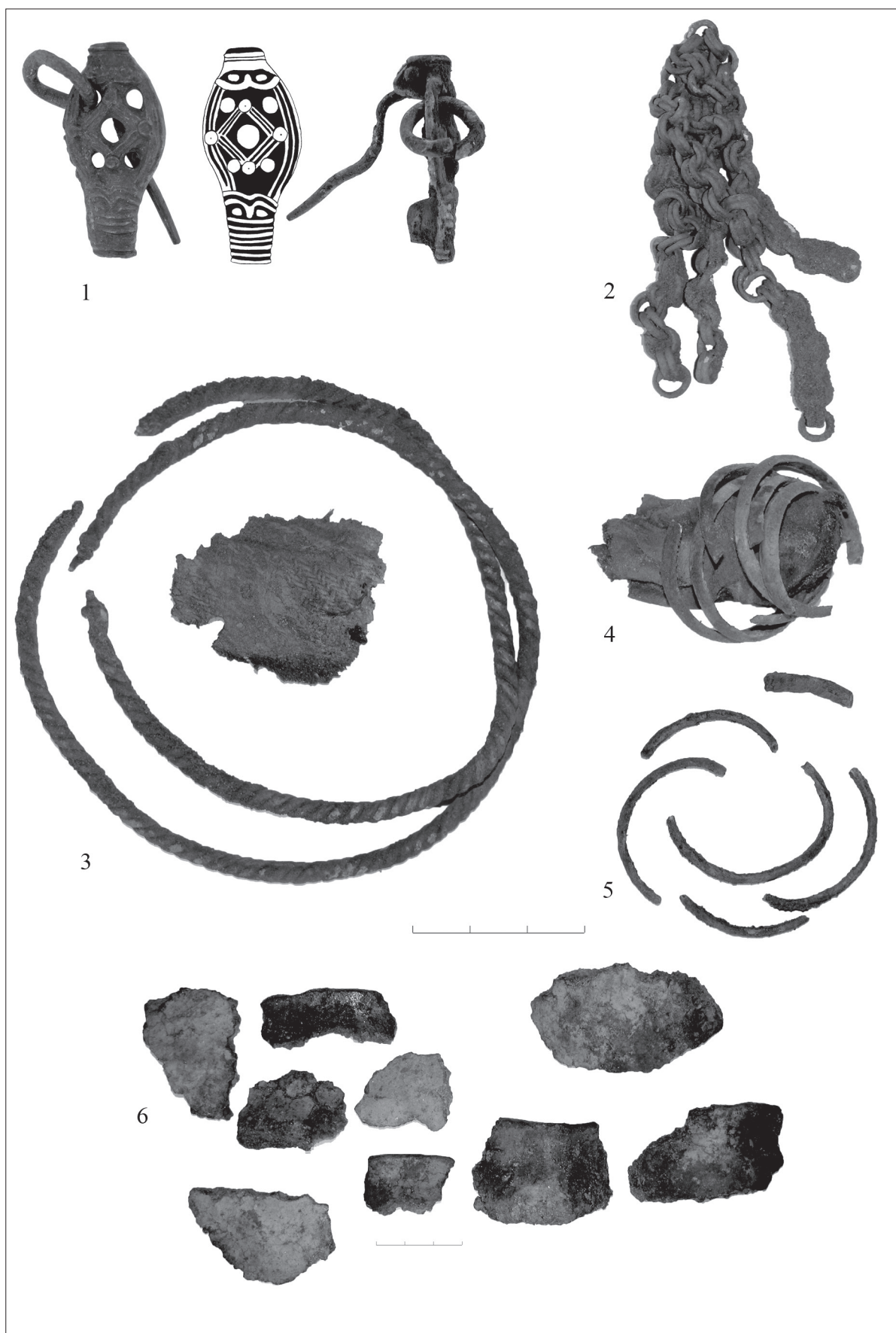


Fig. 2. Viešvilė cemetery III, grave-goods of child's grave 35: 1 flat openwork brooch; 2 chains; 3 neck-ring and textile fragment; 4, 5 spiral bracelets; 6 pieces of a moulded cup (photograph by U. Budvydas).

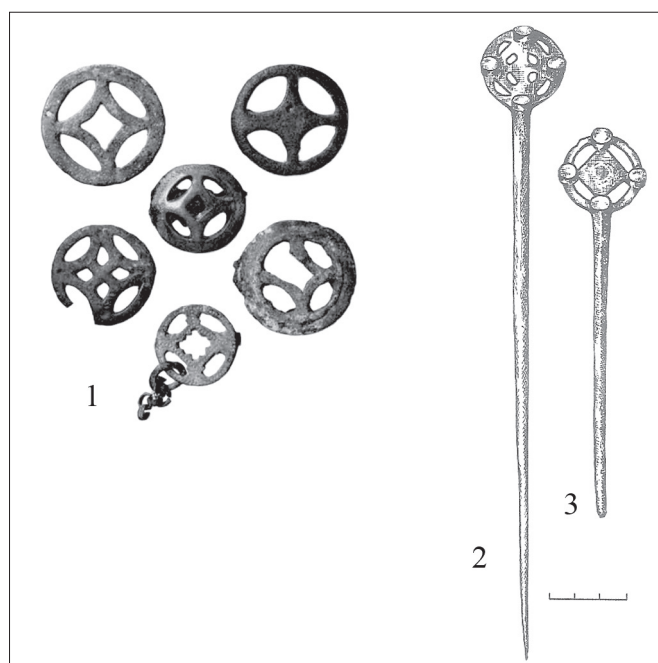


Fig. 3. 1 openwork brooches of the Vendel period (Arrhenius 1965, Fig. 1); 2, 3 pins with a round heads found in Laiviai cemetery (Gintautaitė-Butėnienė, Butėnas 2002, Fig. 36).

imitating a weaving pattern, which is used instead of animal eyebrows. There is a ring, to which chains were fastened, through one of the brooch holes (Fig. 2.2). The fastening needle in the lower part is brass, 3.3 centimetres in length. The hook is cast. No analogies of this brooch were found in Lithuanian archaeological material. And this in turn complicates the dating of the grave. To be more precise, the other grave goods found in the grave complicate the dating. Alongside the brooch, a brass plaited neck-ring was found on the neck of the deceased (Fig. 2.3). It was woven from two wires, the ends of which did not survive. The hands were decorated with two spiral bracelets (Fig. 2.4, 5). A small moulded cup was also put into the grave (Fig. 2.6). It was found at the head of the deceased, in the southeast part of the grave.

The brooch found in child's grave 35 could be assigned to a rich group of flat openwork brooches, which is also divided into different types. These brooches have been discussed in detail by Lithuanian archaeologists. It is known that they were the most widespread brooches in the eighth to the 12th centuries in cemeteries in western Lithuania (Bliujienė 1999, p.112ff). Flat brooches appeared in the eighth and ninth centuries in

the Baltic region under the influence of north European tribes (Bliujienė 1999, p.113). The flat brooch found in Viešvilė does not belong to any type of flat brooches that have been investigated. It is the only brooch found so far of this kind. It should be noted that the brooch was made quite roughly, the proportions of the collar-ring were not kept, and casting defects are visible in some places.

Comparing this brooch with other objects, a similarity with round openwork brooches characteristic of the Vendel period can be noticed (550–850 AD) (Fig. 3.1). They are usually found in Gotland, Upland and Södermanland in Sweden, and in Norway and Finland (Arrhenius 1965, pp.65-91). The brooches have a round collar, the inner part is a rhombus or a cross. The main shapes of these pieces of jewellery were probably borrowed in the manufacture of the Viešvilė brooch. It was decorated with stylised animal heads and bands simulating weaving. This repeats certain elements of the Borre style, characteristic of 850–950 AD. Similar decorative motifs may be found on some objects found in Scandinavia or former Prussia (Wilson, Klindt-Jensen 1966, Pl. XXVII: h; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2006, Fig. 3; Kulakov 2007, Fig. 28.3). The ornamentation

of brooches found in Viešvilė is not decorative, it is more likely a reflection of the Borre style (ornamentation), as an attempt by local craftsmen to imitate it. The brooch found in Viešvilė could have been made by craftsmen who inhabited the east coast of the Baltic Sea. It shows similarities in its separate decorative elements with round pins used in Western Lithuania in the ninth and tenth centuries (Fig. 3.2, 3). As well as the brooch, these pins have a separate head with a rhombus plate in the middle. There are round spots on the ends of the rhombus as well. The present similarity of the jewellery gave the impression that the head of a broken pin was used for the manufacture of the brooch. However, the next stage in the investigation did not prove this hypothesis. Some common elements of decoration may be noticed when comparing them with the flat rhombus brooches found in Miesteliai (Barvai grave VI.30) and Palanga (grave 23) cemeteries (Juga *et al.* 2003, 4204.5; Tautavičius 1961, p.57ff, Fig. 71). These objects share a rhombus decorated with recessed lines and a similar layout of sprouts. A brooch dating from the ninth to the tenth centuries was found in a man's grave in Palanga cemetery.

The shape of the brooch found in child's grave 35 and the rendering of the ornamentation enable us to date this brooch, as well as the whole complex, to no earlier than the second half of the ninth century to the tenth century. The grave stratigraphy and all the material do not contradict this. Next to it, another child's grave, grave 36, was found with a penannular brooch with quadrangular terminals among the grave goods. Since there is no detailed information, it can only be assumed that this piece of jewellery, where shapes typical of both western Lithuania and Scandinavia interlace, was made by a craftsman who inhabited the east coast of the Baltic Sea. On the other hand, the coast of the Baltic Sea where the brooch was made is not so important. The most important thing is that it indicates a certain relationship between the Scalvian community and tribes living in northern Europe.

Two ribbon-shaped brooches, which were lying on the chest area of the deceased, were found in child's graves 30 and 45 (Fig. 4.1, 2). A third one was found accidentally (Fig. 4.3). The brooches recall two triangles connected by their peaks. There is a rhombus widening in the place where a bow should be. Only the brooch found in grave 45 has both the rhombus widening and a small brimmed bow (Fig. 4.1). The brooches are four to 4.4 centimetres in length, and flat. The brooches found in grave 30 and those found accidentally have the same dimensions and are identical, and this shows that they were made by the same craftsman and cast in the same

casting mould. Parts of the brooches are decorated with concentric circles along the edges. Cast hooks survived in the lower part, the needles were probably iron.

According to the shape, these brooches belong to the group of 'equal-armed' brooches. Various shapes and types of them were widespread in the cemeteries of the Frankish empire. Most appeared in the ninth century AD in the western part of the Frankish empire (Wamers 1994, p.588ff, Abb. 176). Later, many were found in the present area of Scandinavia. The Viešvilė brooches, by their shape, are close to the specific group V distinguished by Stefan Thörle (Fig. 5.1,2; Thörle 2001, Taf. 31, 60). These brooches are rare, they were found in Homberg-Mardorf cemetery, Mainz, Germany (grave 3). They are dated to the second half of the seventh century to the beginning of the eighth century (Wamers 1994, Abb. 176). Similarities can be noticed even in the decoration of the brooches: the plates are decorated with circles. The brooch found in Mainz was decorated in a similar way (Fig. 5.2). However, the Viešvilė brooch (grave 30, stray find) has not kept its clear curved bow, its place is imitated by a small flat rhombus. The brooch found in child's grave 45 has such a bow. It also has a different shape. The length of the brooch is four centimetres, and the width in the middle is two centimetres, and at the ends 1.8 centimetres. Although the brooch was made of tin and was found in poor condition, it can be noticed that it has a clearly expressed middle part, a rhombus with a bow. The plates at the ends of the triangle are small with round angles. The bow is likely to form a separate part of the brooch. The brooches found in grave 30 and accidentally were probably made by copying the latter brooch, without the bow because it had lost its functionality. A simplification of the shapes is noticeable among other jewellery from this period and later. For instance, it is particularly evident among crossbow ladder brooches, particularly between the brooches in groups IV and V, which reject some decorative elements and are significantly flattened. These tendencies can also be observed in other brooches.

The child in grave 30 was buried with a string of beads and two spiral bracelets (Fig. 4.4-6). Three clay moulded cups were also found in the grave. In addition to these grave goods, a triangle unit was also put into the grave of the deceased (Fig. 4.7). Its height is 4.5 centimetres, and its width 4.45 centimetres on the base. A loop and a needle are attached in the inner part of the peak of the triangle. The piece of the needle is 1.8 centimetres long. This piece of jewellery is similar to the pins with a triangle head used in the eighth and

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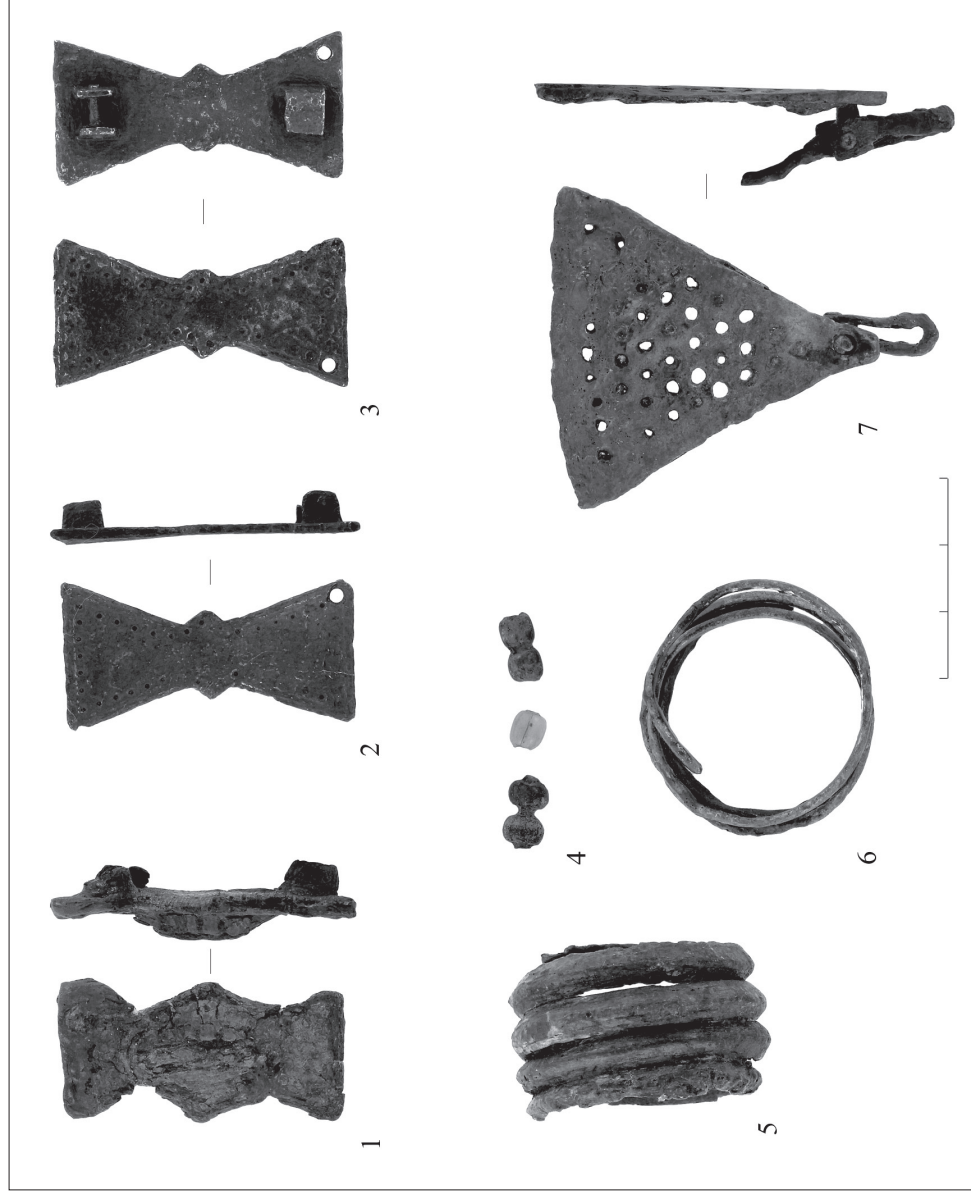


Fig. 4. bronze equal-armed brooches from Viešvilė cemetery III; 1 grave 45; 2 grave 30 (4-7 grave-goods); 3 stray find (photograph by U. Budvydas).

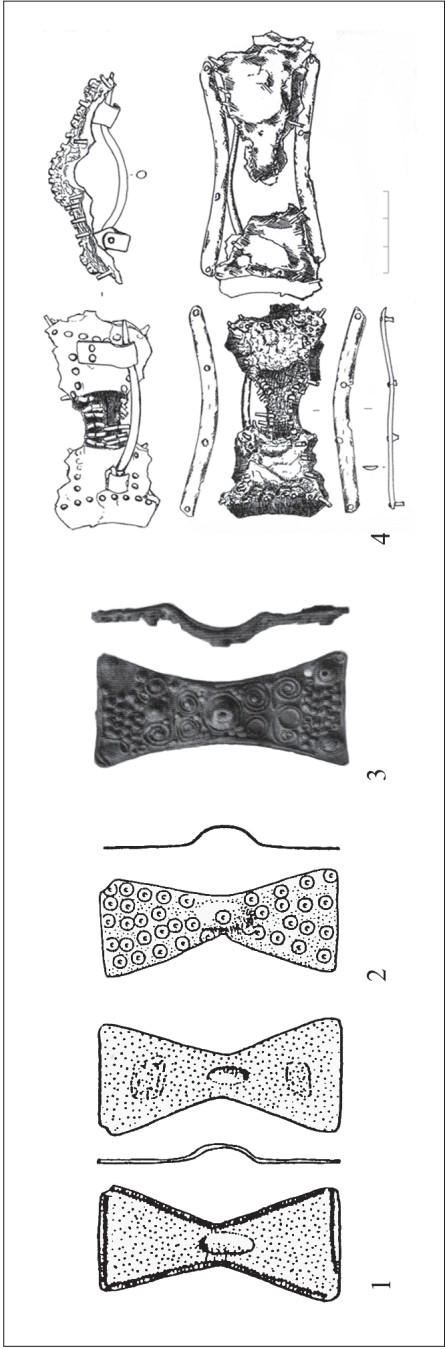


Fig. 5. Equal-armed brooches: 1-2 a particular group of equal-armed brooches V (1 Homberg-Mardorf, tomb 3); 2 Mainz; according to Thörle 2001, Taf. 31); 3 Birka-Lamöya group (3 Birka, tomb 606; according to Thörle 2001, pp.111-112; Arbman 1940, Taf. 83); 4 equal-armed brooch found in Bikavenai, in child's grave 240 (Šilutė district; Tautavičius 1969, pp.209-210 Lithuanian National Museum, card index, LNM AR 490: 754).

ninth centuries in western Lithuania. Although the object found in Viešvilė is now openwork, the tin traces on the inside of the object and the fact that some holes are filled with this metal allow us to state that the outer side of this piece of jewellery was decorated with cogs. This is the same decoration as what was used for some pins with a triangle head in the eighth and ninth centuries. The loop survived in the inner part, and the piece of needle just strengthens the argument that the triangle head of the pin could have been used repeatedly. This dating (eighth or ninth century) of the brooch, as well as the whole complex, is compatible with the surviving material found in the cemetery during the investigation. The brooch found in grave 45 might be older; despite its changed shape, it kept its bow, inherited from the equal-armed symmetrical brooches of group V. The dating of the brooch could partially coincide with the IA 6-type equal-armed symmetrical brooches found in Jurgaičiai and Barvai cemeteries that are located more to the west (Bliujienė, Vasiliauskas 2012, pp.104-107). The latter are dated to the second half of the seventh century to the end of the eighth century.

Ribbon-shaped brooches were worn for a long time. Some were found in Scandinavia (Sogge, Lamøya, barrow 1, Norway; Birka, grave 606, Sweden) (Fig. 5.3). They are characterised by a wide, curved bow in the middle, and the top of the plates is decorated by the filigree technique. The brooches are assigned to the Birka-Lamøya group (Thörle 2001, pp.111-112, Abb. 5). They were worn around 900 AD. A large ribbon-shaped brooch was found in a grave 240 at Bikavėnai cemetery, where the deceased was buried with grave goods more typical of a child (Tautavičius 1969, p.209ff). The brooch is large, flat, nine centimetres long, and five centimetres wide at the ends (Fig. 5.4). The surface is covered with lead and decorated with speckled edging. As well as the brooch, the deceased was buried with a plaited neck-ring with clasp loop terminals and a penannular brooch with cylindrical terminals of the first group, and an amber bead. The grave is dated to no earlier than the tenth century AD.

Creative ideas or trends often cross the boundaries of one tribe or ethnos. By merging with other creations, traditions or points of view, jewellery and other objects acquired new shapes and specific styles. Moreover, the Balts were great jewellers, and imitated 'borrowed' pieces of jewellery perfectly (Bliujienė, Vasiliauskas 2012, p.107). Perhaps this is the reason

why it is impossible to find examples of similar equal-armed brooches in Viešvilė. Today, these are unique brooches, of which the shapes were borrowed from the symmetrical brooches typical of the Western Franks. Anyway, the equal-armed and flat openwork brooches found in Viešvilė are indirect witnesses of certain Baltic economic contacts with tribes that inhabited other coasts of the sea in Scandinavia or Western Europe. The brooches blend in the amount of imported items found in the lower reaches of the River Nemunas, enhancing the statements about the importance of this region in the Middle Iron Age and Late Iron Age at the same time.

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RETOS SEGĖS IŠ VIEŠVILĖS III KAPINYNO LIETUVOJE

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Santrauka

Archeologinių tyrimų metu Viešvilės kapinyne III (Jurbarko r. savivaldybė) buvo aptiktos keturios retos segės. Trys iš jų yra artimos vadinamosioms simetriškoms segėms, kurios pagal formą primena kaspinėlių (4 pav.). Ketvirtoji segė, puošta dviem stilizuotomis gyvulių galvomis ir pynę imituojančiu ornamentu, buvo aptikta vaiko kape 35 (2 pav.). Ši segė priklausytų plokštinių ažūrinių segių grupei. Šiame straipsnyje aptariama galima šių Viešvilės kapinyne III rastų segių kilmė ir chronologija.

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